Through their journey to South Africa to share the gift of music, the members of the Chapel Choir in turn received in ways that reach beyond their participation in the ensemble.

The choir visited communities including Cape Town, Johannesburg, Soweto and Stellenbosch, with performances at churches, high schools, an AIDS clinic and an inner-city ministry, and with the Stellenbosch University Choir. Differences of culture and context faded quickly as guests and hosts alike found common cause through their mutual love of music and an eagerness to learn from and give to one another. And through the connections that happened along the way and in between, the students gained insights into themselves and their own hopes for the future in ways that were transformational, as travel and education always in the best are.

“On almost a daily basis, no matter where we were, whether a school, a church, a concert hall or a homeless shelter, if one person were to stand and begin singing a hymn or a folk tune, every single person in the room would stand and join, regardless of race, native tongue or religious background. The sound was often overpowering as these people raised their voices together in song. All of us were amazed at this, and we long to bring this sense of unity and community pride back to our neighborhoods, our school and our country.”

“I learned so much while in South Africa. I became much more thankful for all that we are blessed with. My eyes were opened to what hope really means, I learned the importance of family and community, I saw the power of music and its unifying elements, and I stood in awe of the welcoming environments we experienced all around this beautiful country!”

“One particular experience that stuck out for me was when we visited a bed and breakfast in one of the shantytowns in Cape Town. Many of the houses were made of various scrap metal, wood, rubber or glass, and looked as if they could fall down at any moment. The woman who ran the B&B told us as she held her daughter close, “Please feel free to walk around and take a look. Make this feel like your home. Take as many pictures as you like. We are not ashamed of how we live—please do not feel sorry for us.” I was extremely touched by this woman’s comments and felt sudden pity, not for her, but for me. What a huge lesson I learned from this experience."

“The Chapel Choir trip to South Africa exceeded my expectations in every way. I never expected to feel such intense acceptance and a sense of community with the people of S.A. The chances we had to sing for students in the schools and in the orphanages really impressed me as a future educator and only made me more excited about bringing my knowledge of music to young children.”

“I will never forget the lessons South Africa and my experiences there taught me about life, God, culture, language, ubuntu, community, and hope. I can’t imagine what my Hope experience would have been like without this choir, this music, these people. What a way to end a four-year saga of the best times of my life to date!”

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